

Ursuline Academy, Dormitory Building  
300 Augusta Street  
San Antonio  
Bexar County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-32-D

HABS  
TEX,  
IS-SANT,  
TD-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HABS  
TEX  
15-SANT  
7D-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

URSULINE ACADEMY, DORMITORY BUILDING

HABS No. TX-32-D

Location: 300 Augusta Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: Link Cowen.

Significance: The Dormitory building, erected 1866-70, was constructed during the same building program as the Chapel, and together they represented the new growth and responsibility of the post Civil War era, especially the Dormitory building.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1866-70.
2. Architect: Although undocumented, it has been accepted over the years that Francis Giraud, Jr., was the architect.
3. Original and subsequent owners: See History section of the Ursuline Academy, HABS No. TX-32.

- B. Historical Context: The construction of the Dormitory building was the result of the Academy's program of physical expansion following the Civil War. The construction was begun in 1866, and the cornerstone was laid and blessed by Bishop Dubuis on September 14, 1866, fifteen years to the day of the Sisters' arrival in San Antonio. During the years 1868-70 the Chapel, adjoining at the northwest corner of the property, was also under construction. It has been written that both buildings were completed in 1870 at a cost of \$50,000.

The Sisters developed a method that distinguished between day students and boarding students. The day students were those who lived at home and only attended classes at the Academy, while the boarding students both lived at the Academy and attended classes. These latter students received a greater amount of religious instruction than the day students and in a sense were considered more like lay sisters than students.

The Dormitory was devoted to the boarding students until circa 1910, at which time it was converted into a Sisters' dormitory.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building for the most part is rectangular with the exception of an angled facade on the west

which follows the line of Augusta Street. Like the Academy Building and the Academy Building Addition, a two-story gallery is included in this building.

2. Condition of fabric: Because of neglect by the present owner, the building has been allowed to deteriorate. The walls, however, are sound, as is the roof and floor framing, but exterior details, such as gallery piers, their decorative capitals and plinths, are in a ruinous state. Although the walls are sound and generally in good condition, the mortar joints are beginning to deteriorate, some falling out.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The two-story structure is 46' wide, 120' long on north side and 152' long on south side, excluding porches. The north and the south sides are twelve bays each and the east side is four bays. The layout of the building consists of a near rectangle and includes an oblique angle at the west wall.
2. Foundation: Apparently rubble limestone laid in lime mortar.
3. Walls: Walls are soft rubble limestone of local origin, soft creamy yellow in color and laid in lime mortar. North and east facades have a thick, rough textured, cement stucco finish of a grey-white color.
4. Structural system, framing: Walls: load bearing masonry. Floor systems: all common wood joist type. Attick framing: wood rafters supported by wood girders, which are in turn supported by simple post trusses with struts.
5. Porches: A two-story, wood-framed gallery extends across the north facade (10 bays) and the east facade (4 bays) terminating at the north facade of the 1853 Academy building. This gallery is supported by cedar posts within paneled box pillars. The pillars "rest" on pedestals composed of metal lath and plaster with molded bases, molded terra-cotta capitals with classical egg and dart, cyma reversa and cavetto moldings.

Gallery floors and roof are wood framed, except lower floor which is stone flagging.

6. Chimneys: Brick and stone.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: There is one principal doorway in the center of the north, east and south facades on the lower floor and a second floor opening corresponding to the one below on the south.

These openings are spanned by segmental arches of dressed limestone voussoirs. The tympanums above the transoms are filled by simple glass transoms.

Doors are inward opening, with glass lights over molded panels.

All secondary openings are spanned by ashlar limestone lintels over which are superimposed simple relieving arches of two ashlar limestone blocks.

- b. Windows and shutters: Openings are spanned with simple relieving arches. Jambs are dressed ashlar limestone. Windows are inward opening wood sash casements with some double-hung wood sash replacements. Dormer faces are essentially hinged, solid wood shutters with small, square, glazed openings in the center.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped roof originally covered with wood shingles on slab stripping; covered later by present standing-seam metal roof.
- b. Cornice, eaves: No overhang nor cornice molding. Galvanized metal gutters and leaders; leaders have decorative star motif.
- c. Clocktower: The central feature of this building is the square clocktower centered on the ridge. It is framed with large timbers at each corner. The walls are narrow weatherboarding. The roof is hipped with a double slope with metal sheathing and a metal cross. Each roof slope has a small gabled dormer. The clock faces on the south, east and west sides are round and are of wood covered with painted galvanized metal. The clock mechanism is devoid of identification although it is locally believed that it was imported from France. The mechanism was manufactured for only three faces, there being no provision for drive rods to run a fourth (north side) face.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: Intersecting perpendicular center halls, the north-south hall being substantially wider. Rooms open onto halls on both floors.
- 2. Stairways: The main staircase is located in the center of the eastern half of the building on the north side of the east-west hall. It is a plain, wood dog-leg type, with a simple newel, rail and balusters.

There are secondary stairways at the western end of the east-west hall: one on north side of hall--plain, wood, dog-leg staircase; second on south side: quarter-turn with landing, again very plain.

3. Flooring: Wood, in general. Some linoleum and ceramic tile in small areas.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls and tongue-and-groove wood ceilings with beaded edges. On the second floor, several partitions are of tongue-and-groove with alternate striated boards.
5. Doors: The doors are four-paneled with rather wide stiles and rails. They have glass ventilating transoms.
6. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Unvented gas space heaters. (Building now has gas piping outlets, no flues; heaters have been removed.)
  - b. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The long axis of the building runs east and west. The principal facade faces north, and is across from an asphalt parking lot.
2. Landscaping: The building encloses a courtyard on its south side. There is little planned landscaping. A walk leads from the south central door to the original Academy Building.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.  
Bexar County Architecture Survey  
December 16, 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, Chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermesen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., Director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.